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ABSTRACT

This digest summarizes a report that addresses trends and issues in assessment in relation to the role of college faculty, including advances in assessment to make it more congenial to faculty, different ways in which institutions have approached assessment, and how assessment can be viewed as a faculty role. The report identifies such major shifts in the framework of assessment as focusing on talent development, making direct ties to teaching practice, and attending to the politics underlying judgments of effectiveness. Changes in practice or assessment methods listed include fitting measures to a local context and seeking convergence of multiple measures. Also noted are changing policies governing assessment, such as changing notions of accountability and the move to performance indicators. Six different institutional approaches to assessment are identified, including assessment as part of an institution's fabric, assessment as it relates to accountability, and assessment as scholarship. Finally, six conditions are suggested as necessary if faculty is to view assessment as an integral part of its role. These include embedding assessment in a fiscal and policy context that supports innovation; basing assessment on evidence and forms of judgment that disciplinary specialists find credible; and identifying assessment as a stimulus to reflective practice. (DB)

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Proclaiming and Sustaining Excellence

Assessment as a Faculty Role

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Proclaiming and Sustaining Excellence

Assessment as a Faculty Role

Karen Maitland Schilling and Karl L. Schilling

We are now over 10 years into the most recent wave of interest in assessment in higher education. In many states, publicly supported institutions of higher education have developed assessment programs in response to mandates from coordinating boards. All the regional accrediting associations articulate expectations for assessment, and attention to assessment has moved beyond publicly supported institutions into the private sector. National surveys of leaders in higher education suggest that assessment has been institutionalized quite broadly in American higher education.

These same surveys, however, suggest that campus leaders remain unconvinced about the real benefits of externally mandated assessment and fear misuse of its results. Moreover, although campuses nationwide (with a few notable exceptions) have responded to expectations for the development of assessment programs, faculty have not yet in any substantial numbers recognized and embraced local assessment efforts.

Proclaiming and Sustaining Excellence: Assessment as a Faculty Role explores the various sources of faculty's resistance to assessment and suggests ways to approach assessment that are more congenial to the traditional faculty role. In addressing administrators and faculty, the authors identify major conceptual, methodological, and policy advances over the past decade that may facilitate the faculty's greater engagement with assessment. Administrators are provided with useful frameworks for understanding the faculty's resistance and suggestions for approaches to assessment that respond to these sources of resistance. Faculty are provided with ways of thinking about assessment that comport more naturally with their traditional understandings of the faculty role in the academy.

What Advances in Assessment Make It More Congenial to Faculty?

Eight major shifts have occurred in the broad frameworks that have informed assessment practice: **(1)** focusing on the development of talent rather than simply displaying resources; **(2)** moving away from assuring minimal competency; **(3)** broadening the focus beyond linear, goal-centered approaches; **(4)** highlighting epistemological differences among the disciplines; **(5)** redirecting the focus to students and their learning processes; **(6)** making direct ties to teaching practice; **(7)** thinking of improvement as a continuing agenda; and **(8)** attending to the politics underlying judgments of effectiveness. Each of these broad theoretical shifts has shaped developing assessment practice to make it more congenial to faculty interests and dispositions.

Five broad changes in practice or assessment methods are also discussed: **(1)** fitting measures to a local context; **(2)** seeking convergence of multiple measures; **(3)** involving new disciplinary perspectives; **(4)** valuing authenticity; and **(5)** distinguishing between measurement and judgment.

Changing policies governing assessment include **(1)** changing notions of accountability; **(2)** the move to performance indicators; **(3)** barriers to the institutionalization of assessment; **(4)** false starts that incur hostility from the faculty; and **(5)** significant inroads on campuses toward the acceptance of assessment.

How Have Different Institutions Approached Assessment?

Practices at several institutions have been cited repeatedly in the literature on assessment over the past two decades. Specific institutional contexts and cultures have enabled or fostered the development of very different approaches to assessment at each institution. Six different institutional approaches are described: **(1)** assessment as part of an institution's fabric; **(2)** assessment as related to accountability; **(3)** assessment as an administrative service; **(4)** assessment as scholarship; **(5)** assessment as an opportunity for teaching; and **(6)** assessment as an add-on responsibility. Campuses where assessment falls into one of these categories are discussed in terms of the role faculty play in assessment.

How Can Assessment Be Viewed as a Faculty Role?

Six conditions are necessary if faculty are to view assessment as an integral part of their role:

1.Assessment must be embedded in a fiscal and policy context that supports innovation under administrative leadership providing vision and support.
2.Assessment must be grounded in significant questions that faculty find interesting.
3.Assessment must rely on evidence and forms of judgment that disciplinary specialists find credible.
4.Assessment must be rooted in a language and metaphors appropriate to the context.
5.Assessment must be identified as a stimulus to reflective practice.
6.Assessment must accommodate the nature of faculty life in the academy.

Proclaiming and Sustaining Excellence concludes by offering a set of principles for developing effective assessment programs that will engage faculty in meaningful assessment.

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This report was prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education in cooperation with the Association for the Study of Higher Education and published by the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at the George Washington University. Each report is a definitive review of the literature and institutional practice on a single critical issue. Many administrators subscribe to the series and circulate reports to staff and faculty committees with responsibility in a report's topic area.

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